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AUTHOR Richardson, Rita C.; Norman, Katherine I.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes intrapersonal and interpersonal attributes needed for emotional growth and character development, stressing the importance of teaching children personal discipline and doing "good because good is good to do" rather than the use of behavioral interventions. In the area of intrapersonal competence, the paper proposes that self-discovery, self-management, delayed gratification, courage, and honesty are essential for attaining personal maturity. Empathy, altruism, problem solving, tolerance, and social deftness are described as indispensable for attaining positive interpersonal competence. The paper also proposes strategies and activities for parents and teachers to assist children in their emotional growth. (Contains 20 references.) (KB)

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RUNNING HEAD: Facilitating Character Development

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Rita C. Richardson

Professor

Department of Special Education

Southeastern Louisiana University

University Box 879

Hammond, Louisiana 70402

Phone (504) 549-2214

FAX: (504) 549-5030

E-Mail: rrichardson@selu.edu

Katherine I. Norman

Associate Professor

California State University San Marcos

College of Education

San Marcos, California 92096

Phone: (619) 750-4300

FAX: (504) 750-4323

R. Richardson
K. Norman

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ABSTRACT

This article describes attributes needed for emotional growth and character development. The article de-emphasizes the use of behavioral interventions and stresses the importance of teaching children personal discipline and doing "good because good is good to do." The authors discuss five intra-personal and five inter-personal attributes necessary for character growth. In the area of intra-personal competence, the authors propose that self-discovery, self-management, delayed gratification, courage, and honesty as essential for attaining personal maturity. Whereas, empathy, altruism, problem solving, tolerance, and social deftness are described as indispensable for attaining positive inter-personal competence. Strategies and activities are proposed for parents and teachers to assist children in their emotional growth.

Doing Good Because Good is Good To Do: Facilitating Character Development

Climbing stairs had become a struggle since I fractured my foot. The crutches were awkward and cumbersome and I experienced great difficulty with mobility. My five year old granddaughter, Kaitlyn, was attempting to help me by removing various obstacles out of my way, and by encouraging my efforts. Her concern and tenderness made me exclaim "Thank you Kaitlyn, but why are you so good and kind?" She turned around, wrinkled her little brow in thought and following a few seconds of intense contemplation said "Rita dearest, there are many good people in this world and I just happen to be one of them, I like to do good, that's all." Her response seemed so simplistic and pure, but it also denoted great insight and wisdom.

Our persistence in behavioral procedures using the "carrot and the stick" to manage children in schools and in homes has often resulted in their lack of acquiring social responsibility and emotional competence. Children frequently expect to be reinforced for their good deeds, and refuse to comply when rewards are not provided. Parents and teachers consequently resort to punishment and eventually promote a circle of dependence and defiance. Social and emotional competence are not fixed at birth and children need to learn skills to enable them to develop character and fulfilling lives (Goleman, 1995). Children can develop character and moral strength when they do not depend on continuous external reinforcement. How can adults facilitate character development in children?

We identified five intra-personal attributes and five inter-personal attributes necessary for character growth. Intra-personal competence is achieved through self-discovery, self-management, delayed gratification, courage, and honesty. Whereas, empathy, altruism, problem solving, tolerance, and social deftness are attributes needed to grow in inter-personal adeptness. In the following paragraphs, each of the identified attributes are defined and discussed, and suggested strategies and activities are presented to help children on their journey to maturity.

Self-Discovery

Philosophers and writers throughout the ages have dealt with the question "Who am I?" Shakespeare's Plonius advised his son Laertus in these words: "To thy own self be true, and it must follow like the night, the day. Thou canst then be false to any man." (Yale Shakespeare, 1947). In other words, you must develop intra-personally to be able to relate inter-personally. It appears that no one is spared from experiencing an identity crisis sometime or another, whether in adolescence or in middle age. However, some individuals are better prepared to deal with these crisis than others. We can prepare students to better understand themselves by personalizing education. This is especially important in large schools where education is often depersonalized. Teachers must send the message, "You are unique, and you have something to offer." Students can be instructed and learn to be introspective and discover their strengths and weaknesses. It is O.K. to realize that "I am a great reader, my math skills are not so good, but I can improve my math." Self-discovery can be achieved through various strategies. Don Lowry (1988) devised a system entitled *True Colors* to help youngsters reach self-understanding by discovering their personality types. Personality temperament theory is a methodology for helping individuals understand personal behavior and the behaviors of others. The concept of *True Colors* is based on type theory submitted by Carl Jung (1971) and elaborated in a measurement instrument developed by Myers and Briggs (Myers and McCalley, 1985). Through understanding various personality types, students achieve understanding of self and of others and realize that it is O.K. to be different, and that sometimes they need to flex to accommodate to the personalities of others. Self-discovery guides students to become motivated and persistent in accomplishing goals. They do not deny their weaknesses, but rather strive for self-improvement and eventually self-fulfillment.

Self-Management

Building a strong character involves the ability to manage oneself. Acquiring self-management is not easy because in many cases adults encourage dependency. Teachers can help their students to regulate

their own behaviors by empowering them to accept responsibility. Poor self-control is an indication of a weak character. Youngsters can be taught self-control through a system of self-recording. They can increase awareness of their behaviors by simple recording methods such as keeping a journal, using self-check lists, and graphing of behavior frequencies. Students can learn to evaluate their actions, to plan alternatives to inappropriate behaviors, and to recognize the consequences of their behaviors. Adults must provide a warm and democratic climate to teach self-discipline. Children need boundaries, but they also need the freedom to make choices. Glasser (1992) argues that students can achieve responsibility when teachers relinquish their role of "boss-managers" and adopt the role of facilitator or "lead-manager." Boss-managers rely on rewards and punishment to keep control, whereas lead-managers share their power with their students as they learn and increase in maturity. As students become less reliant on extrinsic reinforcement, they learn to do good because good is good to do.

Delayed Gratification

Delayed gratification enables children to control their actions in spite of external pressures. Children who can delay immediate rewards have a stronger sense of self and are more able to generalize this ability to different situations. In an early experiment using marshmallows, Mischell (1974) demonstrated that preschool children used various strategies to delay gratification. They were promised larger marshmallows if they could wait. The strategies children used to delay gratification were (a) thinking about positive attributes of the marshmallow, (b) reminding themselves of the rewards, and (c) reviewing the attributes of the marshmallows. The subjects who were able to wait were more socially and academically successful, and led more personally satisfying lives (Goleman, 1995).

It is difficult to teach delayed gratification in a materialistic society. Our system makes it easy to acquire goods on credit. However, children must be taught to wait, to take turns, and to practice patience. Cognitive restructuring procedures can help children change their pattern of thinking and feeling. Teachers can model verbal mediation and direct their students to talk themselves out of immediate

indulgence. The next step is to restructure their thinking with more appropriate thoughts. "I can wait my turn, I'll ask my question when Sally is through talking." The "Thinking Steps" described by Richardson (1996) Stop, Think, Plan and Check teach children to stop and consider their actions, to think of consequences, to plan alternative behaviors, to evaluate their plans, and to experience intrinsic satisfaction through self-reinforcement, "I'm great, I did it!"

Courage

Courage is a quality of mind and spirit that allows individuals to act in spite of opposition or fear. Children who demonstrate courage are assertive, considerate, determined, and confident. It is important for children to learn when and how to be assertive. Frequently, children are not allowed to express their opinions or feelings, and when they finally do, they act aggressively and are consequently punished. Conversely non-assertive children may withdraw and harbor feelings of hostility and passive aggression. In either case, the need for assertion manifests itself in rebellious acts. Children can be taught responsible and empathetic assertion without violating the rights of others, while maintaining individual rights. Adults sometimes hesitate to relinquish their authoritarian role, and children's assertive behaviors are often misinterpreted as rude and impudent. In responsible assertion training, children are taught the difference between aggressive, non-assertive and assertive behaviors. Empathetic assertion includes being considerate of the feelings and the rights of others. Courage requires self-advocacy and confidence. When children exhibit confidence, they are more likely to succeed in their endeavors. Expectation for success is higher for children who receive encouragement and approval. They develop a healthy sense of self and are not afraid to express themselves or take risks. They expect to succeed without constantly expecting external rewards. Their successes become their reinforcement and promote future courageous deeds.

Parents and teachers can foster courageous behaviors by allowing children to take risks and refrain from punishment when children do not succeed. Failure is not a negative and should be interpreted as a necessary part of learning. Unfortunately, the majority of schools equate school grades with success and

failure, and children equate their own sense of self with their grades. Adults can use videos and books which denote courageous acts and discuss incidents of courage and risk-taking. Many different types of courage are demonstrated by historical figures such as Joan of Arc, Helen Keller, Martin Luther King, and Mahatma Ghandi.

Honesty

In various polls on value systems, honesty ranked the highest as the most desired value (Rokeach 1979; Richardson and Wilcox 1997). Adults are often concerned when children and adolescents lie to escape punishment or to receive rewards. In investigating children's moral reasoning, Piaget (1965) concluded that children judge the seriousness of a lie not by the intention to deceive but rather by how much the lie varies from the truth. As children grow older, they begin to understand that dishonesty includes both making a false statement and intending to deceive. In addition to helping children develop honesty, teachers can guide students in developing personal integrity and the ability to maintain moral principles in face of difficulty. Cheating in schools and universities is a social problem often displayed by adolescents and young adults (Curtis, 1996). Adults in prominent roles are often poor models in that respect. Although honesty appears to be valued by adults, cheating often occurs in various aspects of society, especially when cheaters believe that they can avoid being uncovered. Competitive environments and fear of failure encourage cheating. Parents and teachers bear equal responsibility in the development of honesty in children. Modeling honesty is first and foremost essential. Nobody's perfect, and when mistakes are made, adults must face them, express remorse and make reparation. Schools can restructure learning strategies to minimize cheating. Davis (1992) suggests that student cheating actually illustrates sound principles of teaching and learning. Open book tests, self-checking, open-ended questions, and cooperative problem solving can decrease cheating and increase self-concept and collaboration. Through discussions, teachers can lead students to moral decisions without preaching or imposing personal beliefs.

Social Deftness

Certain behaviors are expected and accepted in various societal circles. Diverse ethnic cultures may disagree on what is socially accepted. Nevertheless, there are certain social mores that are predominant in a culture as a whole, and are necessary for successful coexistence. Howard Gardner (1993) noted that the essence of interpersonal intelligence is the ability to read the desires, the moods and intentions of others and to respond appropriately. Many acts of violence in schools are the results of teasing, rejection, and frustration. Teachers can teach acceptance of differences, collaboration and cooperation skills as well as the art of handling relationships. Students who are skilled in the social arts have mastered "people skills." They are able to organize and lead groups and make every individual feel important. They are insightful about people's motives, feelings and concern (Goleman, 1995). The school is the social hub for most youngsters, and therefore, is an excellent environment to teach social competence. This must be well planned and implemented in a positive manner. The Louisiana legislature recently passed a law requiring students to use the terms "yes sir/ma'am -no sir/ma'am." School systems were considering punishment for students who violated this law. The legislators had good intentions, however, they failed to realize that social skills cannot be legislated. If the mission of education is to prepare students for the real world, then educational curricula must include affective as well as cognitive goals. In a recent poll of the public's attitudes on educational issues, the respondents favored the teaching of values in public schools. All groups were in strong agreement on teaching honesty, democracy, acceptance of people of different races and ethnic backgrounds, caring for friends and family members, moral courage, patriotism and love for country (Rose and Gallup, 1999).

Empathy

The unfolding of empathy begins as early as infancy and continues throughout adulthood. Children can learn to empathize with others at an early age. Empathy is a quality that gradually develops in stages

over a period of years (Hoffman, 1984). At first, children are aware of a person in distress but are unable to identify with the person. Later they become aware of the person's situation and feelings, but are unable to help. As children develop in character they acquire the willingness and the ability to help someone in distress; in other words they begin to act on their empathy. In the final stage, children can generalize empathy to different settings and with various individuals. The development of empathy is self-motivating and self-reinforcing, therefore, external reinforcement is minimized. Adults can teach young children to be sensitive, compassionate, and helpful to others. Parents and teachers can model empathy and sabotage the environment to provide opportunities for children to demonstrate empathy. Bibliotherapy is an excellent source for demonstrating how to relate to the feelings of others. This strategy consists of reading stories in which the reader can identify with the plots' characters and develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of empathy (Myracle, 1995).

Altruism

Youngsters are frequently viewed as egocentric and self-centered. Egocentrism is the antithesis of altruism. It is often the cause for children's belief that everyone feels and thinks the same way as they do. Young children are limited in their capacity to decenter themselves and this self-centeredness often continues into adolescents. However, Piaget (1965) discovered that young children can be more mature moral thinkers when taught to evaluate their own personal behaviors. Some children younger than seven years old are capable of developing altruism in their interactions and relationships with peers and adults. They are able to put aside their selfish needs and show concern for the welfare of others. A behavior resulting from an altruistic value is not motivated by self-interest, rewards or punishment. Children can learn to develop an internal systems of self-reward and not rely on external reinforcement. To teach altruism, adults need to demonstrate charity, love and sensitivity. These skills are important in influencing consequent behavior in the decentering process necessary for character formation. In addition to modeling altruistic behaviors, adults can use daily experiences as they occur to teach altruistic behavior. Community

projects are excellent conduits for educating adolescents in the art of helping others. Teachers need to assess opportunities in their schools and communities that would involve students to offer their time and skills in altruistic assignments.

Problem Solving

Peaceful coexistence requires the ability to amicably resolve conflicts through a problem solving process. It requires an understanding of reciprocity and equality in social exchanges. Young children experience difficulties with problem solving because they have not attained that level of understanding. However, caregivers must model problem solving by "walking" children step by step through a real or imagined problem. Early childhood teachers can teach their young students to value peace to counteract the violence they may experience in their environment or from television programs. Children can be taught at an early age the skills of negotiation, mediation, compromise, apology, and forgiveness. As they mature, they are able to apply their social experiences and skills to find solutions. Due to the rising violence in schools, educators are implementing strategies to assist elementary and secondary students to solve problems in a manner expected from a civilized society. Mediation teams made up of students are trained to help peers to negotiate differences, to compromise with honor and to establish a climate free of dissent. Collaboration and cooperation has replaced "cut throat" competition in many circles. In classrooms, teachers can assign tasks that contribute to values promoting peace. Abrams (1994) suggests assignments involving Nobel Peace prize winners for teaching critical issues of peace. Educators must model peaceful solutions and retaliation is not an option. Twenty-seven states still use corporal punishment as a punitive measure (Evans and Richardson, 1995). Punishment is counter-productive, and when adults physically punish children, they model aggression and violence.

Tolerance

Student bodies are becoming increasingly heterogeneous and diverse. Diversity can positively contribute to an existing culture, however, diversity can also present a myriad of problems. Attitudes of

racial superiority or fear of losing power frequently leads to intolerance and prejudice. Teaching tolerance is critical for peaceful coexistence and children should be taught at an early age and throughout their adolescence to accept differences and to celebrate diversity. Tolerance includes the ability to understand, accept and refrain from prejudging others. Very young children are initially "color blind" and do not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, or gender. However, children learn what they see and hear. They take on the values of their parents, peers, and other individuals in their environment. Goleman (1995) refers to Thomas Pettigrew's description of the development of prejudice. He states that the feelings of prejudice can be acquired in young children; however, convictions and justifications of prejudice are formed at a later age. He adds that it is easier to change intellectual beliefs than it is to change emotions. People may change the way they outwardly behave, but it is far more difficult to change attitudes. For example, civil rights legislation have caused the public's behavior to change in the treatment of minorities. However, prejudicial attitudes still remain in many circles. Teaching tolerance involves modeling acceptance of differences and refraining from devaluing and ridiculing people who deviate from the majority (Richardson and Norman, 1997). Like charity, teaching tolerance begins at home. Parents are constantly transmitting their values to their children through modeling in words and deeds. Children are quick in picking up on discriminatory innuendos and "jokes." Parents and teachers can teach tolerance through role playing activities and exposing students to the richness and contributions of diverse cultures.

Conclusion and Further Recommendations

The self-esteem movement that swept society in the seventies and eighties resulted in groups of young people who had difficulty in extending themselves emotionally and feeling little responsibility to others. The nineties brought a renewed national interest in cooperation and service to others. As we help children develop physically, cognitively and emotionally, we can teach them that they are responsible to

make the world a better place and do good simply because good is good to do. Schools have traditionally enforced a behavioral system of discipline based on rewards and punishment which does not encourage personal discipline. Parents, educators and all members of communities bear the responsibility of helping children and adolescents acquire social responsibility and emotional competence. The future of our children and society depends on our acceptance of this charge and its accompanying tasks. The suggested strategies and activities in this article can help children develop integrity and become accountable for their actions and their contributions to humanity. Perhaps, in the not too distant future, instead of lamenting adverse behaviors so often depicted in the media, we will be able to say "there are many good people in this world, and I just happen to be one of them."

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